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DOES JESUS TEACH THE "RAPTURE?"
A Consideration of Matthew 24
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Does Matthew 24 teach a rapture prior to the second coming of Christ? Many Christians who read this section believe it does. They base such belief on Jesus' words in verses 40-41

"Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left."

Surely, Lutherans understand that Scripture does teach a "rapture." This teaching is based on the solid testimony of scripture. However, the real point at issue is the TIMING of the rapture--NOT whether or not it will happen. St. Paul in I Thess. 4:17 describes this being "caught up in the air" as happening at the sounding of the Final Trumpet on the Last Day.

In spite of such clear teaching of Scripture, however, many Christians presume that there will be another (or other) rapture(s) prior to the Last Day. Often, they believe that such rapture will occur before the Great Tribulation and/or preceding the Millennium (1000 year reign of Christ on earth). To support their view these Christians, who are known as "Pre-millennialists," misuse Jesus' words in Matthew 24:40-41. In order to clarify this issue, all we need do is to look at and understand Jesus' message in Matthew 24.

In looking at Matthew 24, one readily notes that in this passage Jesus is prophesying regarding the end of the world. Chapter 24:1-14 is the first summary of this teaching. In verses 15-25, Jesus comments on the foregoing by beginning with the word, "So," and describes in greater detail the end time. Verses 26-31 are an even further amplification of Jesus' teaching of the end including detail previously not given in this chapter. The most remarkable of these details is the description of His coming "in glory."

Jesus pauses from this description of the end by using a simple illustration: that of a fig tree (vv. 32-35). This is Jesus' way of having His hearers "get a handle" on what He had previously been saying in much the same way a pastor will use an illustration in a sermon.

In 24:36ff, Jesus describes in a more detailed way one of the disciples' greatest concerns, namely, the time and the day of His coming. Though He does not disclose the precise date, He does describe various situations which will indicate the nearness of His coming (vv. 37-39). This portion of His discourse ends,

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It is because of these two possible fates that Jesus warns His disciples, "Therefore keep watch" (v. 42). Such warning, like that of Peter (II Peter 3:11), is given so that God's people will not be found unprepared for His coming (Mt. 24:43) and be "left" for destruction. Rather, it is Christ's intention that His saints be found ready at the time of the last Trumpet so that they will, with all the saints, will be "taken" to meet Christ in the air.

Does Matthew 24 teach an additional rapture other than that which occurs at the end of time? Certainly not! What greater authority do we need--or could we have--than the Son of Man who not only presents us with such clear teaching on the rapture but who will Himself appear at the Last Day! Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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